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Impacts on Current and Former Athletes**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Scudder', is written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT (161 WORDS):

This paper aims to introduce and educate the reader about the sport of synchronized skating. This capstone goes into detail concerning the aspects of the sport itself, the history, the culture, and the impacts on current and former athletes. This research is accomplished with primary sources from interviews with athletes themselves, as well as secondary research from other skating sources.

The goal of this paper is to educate readers on the sport, and to spark an interest in a growing discipline of figure skating. A DVD is included with four different videos to demonstrate the different skating elements and to highlight significant competitive programs from recent years.

In order, the DVD first includes a demonstration video from the USFSA. The second video is of the 2011 World Synchronized Skating Champions, the Rockettes from Finland. Following is the 2010 World Synchronized Skating Championship, the Haydenettes, bronze medalists from the U.S. Lastly is Chicago Jazz, the first U.S. Junior team to medal at the 2006 Junior World Synchronized Skating Challenge Cup.

Synchronized Skating: A Look Into the Sport, Culture, and Impacts on Current and Former Athletes

Throughout the world, sport has been an invaluable tool to teach not only physical health and wellbeing to those participating, but also on how to become mentally and emotionally developed persons. While many sports have been around for hundreds of years, there are many recently developed sports that are emerging on the International stage. Synchronized figure skating (oftentimes called “Synchro” for short by those involved, or aware of it) is one of these continuously growing and expanding sports. For those who do not know what it is, Sylvia Muccio aptly describes it as being, “Precise and athletic, like Rockettes on ice” (Slater, 2002). It requires the skills of singles, pairs, and ice dancing combined together. This paper describes the history and future of synchronized figure skating, introduces the culture of the sport with additional focus on current and former athletes, as well as examines some of the positive and negative impacts of synchronized figure skating.

The United States Figure Skating Association [USFSA] describes synchronized skating as:

A team sport where a group of 8-20 skaters perform a program together. It uses the same judging system as singles, pairs and dance and is characterized by teamwork, speed, intricate formations and challenging step sequences. Elements in synchronized skating include blocks, circles, wheels, lines, intersections, moves in the field, moves in isolation, no-hold step sequences, spins and pairs moves (2011).

Although these terms may seem mysterious, a DVD with performances of different synchronized skating programs will demonstrate exactly what all of these elements are, along with different competitive programs. This hopefully will aid in understanding synchronized skating at a visual level.

Currently, the sport is open to female and male skaters. Typically teams are made up of girls, but there are teams that have males skating as well. Bruce Webber, a journalist for the New York Times, interviewed what is believed to be the only all male synchronized skating team in New York, aptly called "Men 'n Sync" (2005). Kelly Hodge, the director of Synchronized Skating and Collegiate Programs says that, "It's a coed sport, and we don't keep track, but if you said they were the only ones, probably no one would argue. We don't know of any other all-male teams" (Webber, 2005). People may argue that there are pro's and con's to having one or more males on a team, but for the foreseeable future there is no discrepancy with coed teams in competition.

History and Future of Synchronized Skating

With every sport comes a beginning that makes each one possible. For the sport of synchronized figure skating, it began back in the month of October in 1956 (Porter, 2006). Dr. Richard Porter recalls that in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the University of Michigan, a group of girls were gathered at the ice rink to put together a "precision chorus number" to be performed during the halftime of a University of Michigan hockey game (2006). After a few shows, the group officially became known as the Hockettes (Porter, 2006). With the title also came along set practice times and a coach to help the girls create the performances for the halftime shows. Eventually there were tryouts to

become a member of the team, which were judged by USFSA judges (Porter, 2006). The Hockettes soon became an official group addition to the Ann Arbor Figure Skating Club's program.

A few years after the development of the Hockettes, Dr. Richard Porter stated that, "SKATING magazine published an article in 1961 about the Ann Arbor Club's experience, and Dr. Gordon C. Brown got us an invitation to show a film at a USFSA Governing Council meeting" (2006). From this point on, a catalyst began that created the stepping-stone to introduce other skating clubs around the country to what was then called precision skating. One of the highlights for the Hockettes that Dr. Richard Porter recalls was when, "the team skated in the USFSA's fiftieth anniversary show, 'Champions on Ice'" (2006).

In order for the original vision of precision skating to take off and grow around the country, competition had to be developed to encourage that growth. In 1975, the Tri-State council proposed an annual competition consisting of teams who were members of the USFSA or the CFSA clubs (Porter, 2006). Soon after, the first competition, consisting of sixteen teams, was held on March 27, 1976, hosted by the Ann Arbor Figure Skating Club (Porter, 2006). Following the first competition, Dr. Richard Porter explained that, "Canada held the first National competition, but the U.S. was close behind. Full-scale Sectional and National events were on the way by 1984" (2006).

After starting the first "Synchro" team the Hockettes, Dr. Richard Porter was dubbed by many as the "Father of Synchro". Naturally, it seemed fitting to those in the skating world to host a competition held in the United States in his honor. December 4-

5th, 2010 marked the 15th anniversary of the Dr. Richard Porter Classic (Ward, 2010). Over the years it has grown to include teams from outside the U.S. borders. This past year, the competition included teams from all over the United States, teams from Canada, as well as teams traveling all the way over from Finland.

It has been over fifty years since the humble beginnings of what was once called precision skating, now known as synchronized figure skating. Within that timeframe, much has changed besides the name of the sport. A look into the expansion of synchronized skating competition within the United States, as well as international competition, is necessary to understand the future international growth.

According to USFSA "Synchro Fact Sheet", the first U.S. Synchronized Team Skating Championships were held in Bowling Green, Ohio in 1984 (2006). Soon after the first Nationals, in 1989 Sweden held the first International Synchronized Skating competition (ISU, 2011). Roughly ten years after the first Nationals, the ISU officially recognized synchronized skating as the fifth discipline in figure skating in 1994 (USFSA, 2006). Once the ISU recognized synchronized skating as an additional discipline, the first World Synchronized Skating Challenge Cup was held in Boston, Massachusetts two years later in 1996 (USFSA, 2006). This competition was a starting point to creating a World Championships for Synchronized. Since synchronized skating is not yet in the Olympics, a topic to be covered in detail later, a World Championships is essentially grouping the top senior level teams together in competition, just as the Olympics would. The first World Synchronized Skating Championships sanctioned by the ISU was held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the United States (USFSA, 2006).

Although synchronized skating is a sport with competitors all over the world, the focus on the competition aspects will be considered through the lens of U.S. Figure Skating. Due to "Synchro" being a constantly growing sport in America, the numbers are usually changing from competition season to competition season. According to the USFSA website, back in the, "2006 competitive season, 445 synchronized teams registered with U.S. Figure Skating, and the majority competed in the qualifying competitive system. There are approximately 8,000 active synchronized skaters in the United States" (2006). Since then, more recent numbers have come out. According to the USFSA website, more recently there are approximately, "525 teams registered with U.S. Figure Skating and nearly 5,000 athletes participate annually in the synchronized skating sectional championships" (2011). Since teams have a minimum of eight and a maximum of twenty competitors, this adds up to a lot of skaters.

In reality, there are many more athletes competing in synchronized skating outside the approximate 8,000. There are younger skaters who still compete although their level is not eligible to qualify for sectional championships. There are technically fifteen different levels that a skater could work their way through in their skating career, depending on their age, as well as how advanced they are in their skating skills. The different levels are: Beginner (One, Two, and Three), Preliminary, Pre-Juvenile, Juvenile, Intermediate, Novice, Junior, Senior, Open collegiate, Collegiate, Open Adult, Masters, and Adult (USFSA, 2011).

There are different competitions that the fifteen levels of synchronized skating teams can take part of in inside and outside of the United States. According to the USFSA, there are six different competition types. The very first, and most basic are the

Non-qualifying U.S. Figure skating Competitions (2011). Then there are the Eastern, Midwestern, or Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Sectionals, depending on the region a skater lives in (2011). Following that are the U.S. Synchronized Team Skating Championships (2011). This is also most commonly referred to as "Nationals". After that are the international competitions. This would include the ISU sanctioned international synchronized skating competitions, the World Synchronized Skating Challenge Cup for Juniors, and the World Synchronized Skating Championship (2011). The World Skating Challenge Cup and the World Synchronized Skating Championship are essentially like Junior Olympics and the Olympics for the junior and senior level teams, respectively.

The USFSA website goes into greater detail about which teams are able to compete in the different levels of competition:

Teams competing at the developmental levels of preliminary, pre-juvenile, open juvenile, open collegiate, or open adult may also compete at the Eastern, Midwestern or Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships, held annually at the end of January.

Teams at the competitive levels of juvenile, intermediate, novice, junior, senior, collegiate, adult or masters compete first at their respective sectional championships. A placement in the top four at sectionals earns them a spot at the U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships.

Top-performing teams at the junior and senior levels at have the opportunity to earn a berth to the U.S. Synchronized Skating Team, with the top two senior teams going on to represent the United States at the World Synchronized Skating Championships (2011).

As stated before, since synchronized skating is not currently on the Winter Olympic roster, the World Challenge Cup and World Championships act as an imitation Olympics for the advanced level skater.

According to International Skating Union Website, at the 2010 World Synchronized Skating Championships there were, “twenty-three teams from eighteen countries participating: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States” (2011). The large amount of international teams clearly demonstrates the forceful growth of synchronized skating all over the world. Not only that, it also demonstrates how many countries all over the world have high level teams that are competing at the World level. It may seem that for some sports on the Olympic roster that only a handful of countries are creating athletes to compete at that level. However, to have eighteen countries fueling these high-level teams when they are not even competing in the Olympic shows great promise if and when it does become part of the Olympic roster.

The USFSA Synchronized Skating Fact sheet candidly states, “It’s every synchronized skater’s dream that someday the sport will be included in the Olympic Winter Games” (2006). The future of synchronized skating involves constant development and recognition of the sport around the world. The largest goal, as stated above, is to have “Synchro” as a core sport in the Olympic Programme. In order to answer some of the issues and concerns as to why synchronized skating is not an official Olympic sport requires a look into the Olympic Charter. There are many specific rules and by-laws that pertain to aspects of synchronized skating and the steps that

must be taken for it to become an Olympic sport. This document, which is updated over the years, is essentially a set of rules, guidelines, and by-laws set up not only for the Olympic games themselves, but also for the governing body of the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee [IOC].

To begin with, in rule 46, the "Programme of the Olympic Games", "The choice of all sports for the programme, as well as the determination of the criteria and conditions for the inclusion of any sport in the programme, falls within the competence of the Session. Only sports that adopt and implement the World Anti-Doping Code can be included or remain in the programme" (2010, February 11, p.86). Additionally, in section 4 it states that, "The decision to include a discipline or event in the programme falls within the competence of the IOC Executive Board (2010, February 11, p.87). In accordance with rule 46, by-law 1.6 states, "Prior to any decision on the inclusion of any sport in the programme, the Session may establish specific criteria or conditions for inclusion" (2010, February 11, p.87). Essentially this would mean that there would be types of qualifying competitions and competition point score totals that must be met to allow certain teams to compete at the Olympics. These would very much be like the Sectional, National, International competitions and World qualifying competitions that are in place now. Whether that competition system would need to be changed in order for inclusion remains to be seen.

According to the Olympic Charter, Rule 45 by-law 1, "The IOC Executive Board determines the numbers of all participants in the Olympic Games" (2010, February 11, p.84). By-law 10 for Rule 45 essentially states that the number of entries for each sport is determined two years prior to the games by the IOC Executive Board (2010, February

11, p.85). This would mean that if/when "Synchro" is introduced into the Olympics it would have to be much ahead of time for preparation to take place. In by-laws 12 and 13, they say that for team sports, the number of teams per gender will be no less than eight and no greater than twelve, and that the IOC Executive Board can determine the number of substitutes for each team (2010, February 11, p.86). In this case, since synchronized skating teams can be co-ed, and there are no rules about having males on teams, this number could possibly be modified. If it were to strictly stay at twelve teams for competition, there would need to be more intense competition from countries trying to get a spot to compete in the Olympics, as seen by the World competition from 2010 having twenty-three teams from eighteen countries.

Concerning the number of alternates, teams previously were allowed up to twenty girls competing on the ice as a maximum. Teams with fewer members could skate with fewer skaters with a minimum of twelve. In 2007, to become more compatible with the Olympics, the ISU changed the number of skaters on the ice for senior, as well as junior and novice, to sixteen skaters. Teams find it necessary to have more than the precise amount of skaters on the team in case of illness or injury. By lowering the number of skaters on the ice to sixteen instead of twenty, it allows the teams to be smaller in overall number. This is meant to make it more appealing to house teams from all over the world in the Olympic Village because of the amount of space it would take up.

The amount of athletes allowed in the Olympics leads up to one of the largest arguments of all concerning the future of synchronized skating in the Olympics. Philip Hersh, writing for the Chicago Tribune, states that, "Some feel synchronized skating should be the team event added to figure skating, but it involves a substantial number of

additional athletes and cost for the organizing committee" (2010, October 26).

By-law 14 to rule 45, concerning the Host City and the number of athletes allowed, states, "In the absence of a decision to the contrary taken by the IOC Executive Board and written into the Host City Contract, the number of athletes competing in the Games of the Olympiad shall be limited to ten thousand five hundred (10,500)" (2010, February 11, p.87). This by-law follows directly after by-law 12 and 13 previously discussed. This is one of the most difficult aspects to change about synchronized skating in order to make it more appealing to be a part of the Olympics. Because there is such a limited amount of space in the Olympic Village, possibly adding twelve teams of twenty girls means over two hundred and forty additional athletes. There are many arguments to both sides as to why "Synchro" should be added to the programme, but as for now, unless certain less popular sports are removed so that "Synchro" could be added, it appears to be at a standstill for entry to the 2014 Olympic Games.

Sport Culture of Synchronized Skating

The author of *Communication and Organizational Culture*, Joann Keyton, invites the reader to look at not only the culture of businesses organizations, but the tools to look at the organizational cultures people are members of in every day life. Keyton describes organizational cultural characteristics as having, "Organized and purposeful interaction, communication within and across structural units, and a superordinate goal" (2011, p. 8). A superordinate goal is one that is, "so difficult, time consuming, and complex that it is beyond the capacity of one person" (Keyton, 2011, p. 7) These characteristics can be applied to the different organizational cultures in synchronized skating, going from the specific cultures of different teams, to looking at the culture of

synchronized skating as a sport overall. Those characteristics will also help in understanding the sport at a deeper level from interviews with the athletes themselves.

When looking at synchronized skating as a whole, it meets the organizational culture characteristics described by Keyton. The amount of time spent practicing on the ice, as well as off the ice, demonstrates the organized and purposeful interaction in synchronized skating, as well as the communication within and across structural units. There is interaction necessary to get a team together, to instruct how the programs will be set up, as well as the coaching that is needed to advance the programs. Clearly, there must be a sense of organization throughout all of this in order to have a successful team that works as a unit. Not only is there interaction between the coaches and skaters, but of course between the skaters themselves. There are other dynamics that deal with communication between parents, trainers, assistant coaches, as well as team leaders. The different levels and types of interactions demonstrate the communication within and across structural units in synchronized skating.

Although each team is different and comprised of individual skaters, many of their reactions to the interactions through "Synchro" have similar aspects. According to Emmi Thiel, from Team Unique from Helsinki, Finland, when asked what some of the most important aspects of synchronized skating are to her she said, "The high-leveled coaching and the best teammates" (personal communication, March 25, 2011). When Elyse Fotre, who has skated with Chicago Jazz and University of Illinois, was asked the same question, she said that, "The friendships I have made through this team are relationships that will last a lifetime. I would not have had the opportunity to meet some of these people otherwise" (personal communication, March 23, 2011). Jennifer

Shepherd, who has skated for Chicago Jazz, Michigan State University, and the Haydenettes, believes that the interaction that comes with synchronized skating give you the, "Ability to work with a variety of personalities" (personal communication, March 23, 2011). Similar responses about the importance of the teammates and creating friendships on the team came from other girls who have skated all over the country. Other skaters have said things such as, "I also grew up with the same girls and coaches. They were like a second family to me" (L. Astrom, personal communication, February 27, 2011). Sydney Yovic, from Chicago Jazz, said that the interactions through synchronized skating taught her, "about teamwork, friendship, and being as diplomatic as possible" (personal communication, February 23, 2011).

Although some may think that the superordinate goal for every skater would be to win every competition, there were many other important lessons tied into that goal of being successful. Of course, in any sport, an athlete desires to do their best, whether competing individually, or on a team. Many girls stated similarly that, "Being able to work together as a team despite the outcome was most important" (S. Martin, personal communication, February 23, 2011), along with, "I think what is most important is that I learned how hard work pays off, and that sometimes setbacks just make you work harder and strive for more" (S. Yovic, personal communication, February 23, 2011). Kelly Smith, who skated with Chicago Jazz and on the Miami University Synchronized Skating Team, explains how important it was, "Learning to train, win and lose as a team. Also learning how to work well with girls striving after the same goal" (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Linda Astrom also said that for her it was about, "The spirit of the team and the feeling of belonging and being part of something special.

Sharing the victories and losses together” (personal communication, February 27, 2011). In a way, having these goals of hard work and teamwork united all of the skaters who were interviewed.

Besides the different organizational culture characteristics Keyton uses to look at organizations, she also discusses how, “Organizational culture is a multilevel construct comprising many elements – primary artifacts, values, and assumptions” (2011, p. 21). All of these elements can be seen in each different Synchronized Skating team, as well as through the skaters interviewed.

According to *Communication & Organizational Culture*, primary artifacts are, “visible or tangible – anything that one can see, hear, or feel in the organizational experience” (Keyton, 2011, p. 22). Each skater was asked if they had team colors, a logo, a mascot, and certain cheers/chants that went along with their team. If so, they were asked to describe what they were. Although there are many other artifacts that could be identified, the colors, logo, mascot, and certain cheers/chants appear to be the most visible with different synchronized skating teams, especially when teams are gathered at competition. Since at one point many girls had skated on the same team with other girls interviewed it will be beneficial to look at the individual teams as a whole. The different teams that were mentioned in the interviews were: Chicago Jazz, University of Michigan Synchronized Skating Team, Michigan State University, University of Illinois Synchronized Skating Team, the Haydenettes, Valley Bay Synchronized Skating Team, and Team Unique.

To begin with the team Chicago Jazz, their colors were teal, purple, and black. Shannon DiSalvo described the logo as, “Like the colors, the logo is also for used for

identification, with creative art interpreted through the word 'Jazz,' seen mostly on articles of clothing at competitions. The word 'Chicago' represented location, history, and depth" (personal communication, February 23, 2011). She also describes the mascot of the team, an English bulldog, as, "On the surface, our mascot was promoted with intentions of intimidation (if noticed)" (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Sydney Yovic explained some of the cheers/chants were, "Spelling out Chicago with a long 'O' at the end, and also 'Bite the Bulldog'" (personal communication, February 23, 2011).

Next, the University of Michigan Synchronized Skating Team had the school colors of maize and blue as their team colors, along with the Wolverine as the team mascot (S. Martin, personal communication, February 23, 2011). Since this team was a club at the University, it would make sense that their colors and mascot coincided with the University itself. When asked about cheers/chants, Sherri said, "We had lot of cheers to spark teamwork, good spirits, and as encouragement for a team about to compete."

Jennifer Shepherd, who has skated for Michigan State University, describes their colors and logo as, "Green and white, with the Spartan as the mascot from the school" (personal communication, March 23, 2011). She also says their team chant/cheer was the Michigan State University fight song. As mentioned above, as a school sport at the University, the colors and mascot matched up with the University itself, compared to a club team such as Chicago Jazz, which isn't affiliated with a school or University.

Another University Synchronized Skating team discussed was the University of Illinois. Elyse Fotre mentions their team colors are, "Blue and orange. Our chant was I-L-L-I-N-I at competitions" (personal communication, March 23, 2011). There was no

mention of a mascot for this team, besides the University of Illinois colors.

Jennifer Shepherd, who was also a team member of the Haydenettes, describes the team as having, "No mascot, but the colors of red, white, and black. In addition to the standard 'good luck' and 'Team USA' cheers, the Haydenettes have several cheers that they do in private before competition" (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

The Valley Bay Synchronized Skating Team is one of the two teams with girls that were interviewed that is out of Finland. Viivi Lemstrom from Valley Bay Synchro explained that, "Team colors are blue and white, with the logo being VBS. We don't have a mascot." Essentially the team colors for Valley Bay were the colors on the Finnish flag. However, Roosa Rehumäki did describe the, "colors of the season are dark blue, pink, and purple," which are the colors of their costumes (personal communication, March 22, 2011). Besides "good luck" cheers, Viivi and Roosa did not specify any other cheers that the team had.

The last team that was interviewed was Team Unique from Finland. Linda Astrom describes the team as having, "Club colors of blue, yellow and red. We also used letters TU in our clothes, which comes from our teams name Team Unique. We didn't have a mascot" (personal communication, February 27, 2011). Emmi Thiel from Team Unique also added that, "Our team also has a slogan: You'll never skate alone. All of our cheers are in Finnish and most of them are based on well-known Finnish songs. We have changed the lyrics to match our hobby, competitions, goals etc." (personal communication, March 26, 2011).

It is interesting to see that although these teams are from different locations in the United States, and even the world, almost all of the teams have colors, some type of

logo to go along with the team name, and even a mascot. In a way all of these elements help to unify the teams as a part of a bigger whole in the world of synchronized skating. It is typical at local and international competition for teams to cheer for everyone with their special cheers, to post up their team banner with logo and name, and to have teams stand out in the crowd with their warm-up suits and team jackets. However, not as common in international competition is the use of mascots for different teams. The possible reason that the teams from Finland do not have mascots is that compared to the United States, having all of the colleges, universities, and professional sports teams with mascots, they do not live in a culture where mascots are a heavy identifier. However, that could be a topic of discussion for another paper.

The following element in Keyton's Organizational Culture construct is values. According to Keyton, "Values are strategies, goals, principles, or qualities that are considered ideal, worthwhile, or desirable and, as a result, create guidelines for organizational behavior" (2011, p. 23). There are numerous values learned and implemented through skating on different synchronized skating teams that reach out to skaters no matter what team they belong to. In a way, the culture of synchronized skating embraces these different values and allows them to be transferred to athletes no matter where a skater is, or what team they are on. To begin with, Sydney Yovic expresses what skating has taught her since, "Being on this team [Chicago Jazz] taught me how to be one-hundred percent dedicated and to pour my heart into a sport at a very young age" (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Earlier in the paper, she describes how skating on Chicago Jazz taught her about teamwork, friendship, and diplomacy. When every skater who was interviewed was asked, "What are some of the

most important aspects from being on this team?" they all stated the importance of friendship and teamwork. Other girls like Shannon DiSalvo and Jennifer Shepherd added the importance of discipline. Kelly Smith and Jennifer Shepherd also mentioned the significance of learning to win and lose as a team with grace. Additional values illustrated were time management skills, working with high-level coaches, setting and achieving goals, as well as gaining confidence.

Assumptions are the final element in the Organizational Culture construct. Keyton defines these as, "beliefs that are so deeply entrenched that organizational members no longer discuss them. Although deeply held, these tacit assumptions are subtle, abstract, and implicit" (2011, p. 25). When looking at organizational cultures, this is the hardest of the elements to define. Often it is very difficult to directly ask a person what their assumptions are about an organization they belong to. It is necessary to go about in an abstract way to make a person think about their basic assumptions. In order to accomplish this, each skater was asked what she thought about people who are synchronized skaters. Only one girl, Emmi Thiel, was unable to understand and answer the question due to a language barrier.

Sherri Martin stated she felt, "[Synchronized Skaters] are pretty awesome. To work with that many people, cooperation is required. Not everyone can get function effectively in that kind of environment. There is also the same dedication and commitment required of any other serious athlete" (personal communication, February 23, 2011).

Jennifer Shepherd said, "I have a lot of respect for most synchronized skaters. Successful synchronized skaters have a lot of appealing personality characteristics" (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

Kelly Smith said, "To be good at it, it consumes a large part of you. You have to be in it emotionally, mentally and physically. It's a great experience but takes a lot of energy, resources, and finances" (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

Sydney Yovic believes that, "Synchronized skaters are mature beyond their years because they are worked to the bone to accomplish hefty goals and represent their team and country at a very young age. They have learned obedience, hard work, respect and pride before finishing high school. Synchronized skaters are a breed of people I will always have the utmost respect for because they are passionate, dedicated people who put a lot of sweat, blood, and tears into their sport. We constantly have to prove ourselves and that makes us work so much harder" (personal communication, February 23, 2011).

Shannon DiSalvo stated that, "Most synchronized skaters are in love with the art of ice skating and find synchronized ice skating an exciting risk, since most people aren't aware it even exists. I believe there is some sort of 'perfection' trait obsession tied into their will and/or intent as an individual, which manifests itself in the physicality of the sport. Sometimes I felt synchronized skaters were into this Socialist government aspect of the organization, meaning they love to be 'under control' by choice" (personal communication, February 23, 2011).

Roosa Rehumäki believes, "that those people [synchronized skaters] will get along well with other people" (personal communication, March 22, 2011).

Viivi Lemström stated, "I think they love the sport and what they are doing and that they do anything to reach their dreams" (personal communication, February 28).

Elyse Fotre said that, "I feel a sense of connection and community. I feel as though we all understand what the other skater is going through" (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

According to Linda Astrom, "I think these people have excellent social skills and understanding of others. Hard workers, who do not easily give up, and who always try to do their best, whatever they do in life. They also understand team dynamics and adjust easily to large groups" (personal communication, February 27, 2011).

Overall, it appears that many of the skaters interviewed captured a positive perception towards those who are synchronized skaters, including themselves. The sense of a community, the friendship, teamwork, goals, and hardworking attitude was not lost on the girls. True, there are many sports that can instill these assumptions in athletes and people alike, but there is a special bond between those who are in the sport that may not even speak the same language, but can express themselves with their team on the ice.

After looking at Keyton's Organizational Culture characteristics and Organizational Culture elements, the intricacy of synchronized skating as a whole, as well as when broken down into different teams, is evident. Perhaps one of the positive aspects of sport is that despite competing against others, at the same time there is a unique bond of respect for all of those participating. Much like the cultures of business

organizations, sport, and synchronized skating specifically, is a culture that will continue to constantly grow and evolve as time goes on.

Positive and Negative Impacts

As with any type of sport, there are always positive and negative impacts concerning the physical, mental, and even the emotional makings of an athlete. For those skaters who continue to skate and compete, the benefits of the sport clearly outweigh the negative aspects, but it is important to look at both sides of the spectrum.

Already, there have been positive impacts a skater experiences from synchronized skating mentioned by the skaters interviewed in the previous section. Through training and competition, there are strong emotional and mental benefits seen through the development of friendship, learning the value of teamwork, as well as dedication that are all learned through synchronized skating. Even an appreciation for music and the arts can be instilled due to the artistic nature of the sport, as expressed by Shannon DiSalvo (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Through synchronized skating, Jennifer Shepherd stressed the importance of time management and how she developed that skill by having to juggle skating practices, competition, and going to high school and later college (personal communication, March 23, 2011). Not only does time management pay off in the short term, but it is also a skill that can allow skaters to flourish later in life past high school and college into the business world.

Another very unique aspect about synchronized skating is the amount of traveling skaters are able to experience through competition even before graduating high school. Cheryl Hunt, the team manager of Team Image explains that, "I like that

Synchronized Skating offers a chance to skate at a national level. In figure skating, four kids from the East [coast] can go to nationals; here, there might be four teams of up to 25 skaters" (Slater, 2002). With high school sports, such as football, baseball, basketball, track, gymnastics, etc. there are not many opportunities for athletes to compete past a state level. In this way, synchronized skating allows for the possibility of national competition as a reason for more athletes to be competitive and strive for higher goals that normally would not be possible with other sports.

Not only do skaters get to experience traveling and competing around the country, previously mentioned, the top novice, junior, and senior teams in the United States have the chance to compete internationally. Shannon DiSalvo described that, because of her international ventures with her team Chicago Jazz, "I'd like to believe competing in other countries, and states, encouraged my curiosity of what else happens there when one isn't strictly competing" (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Her curiosity has led her to travel back to places where she has competed, specifically Finland, to learn more about the country and culture that intrigued her. Sydney Yovic had similar feelings in that, "I learned a lot about other cultures as we traveled internationally, and I learned about pride as we represented our country" (personal communication, February 23, 2011). The ability to represent the United States in competition is a rare opportunity that is available to synchronized skaters. As stated before, high school, college, and other club sports often do not have that privilege. Jennifer Shepherd describes her feelings of wearing the Team USA colors at international competitions as being, "Significant because they represent the highest

level of achievement in the sport- the colors and logo are respected domestically and internationally” (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

Additionally, the positives of exercising and healthy body are encouraged in a sport like synchronized skating. Besides practicing on the ice, high-level teams often have off-ice classes of ballet, Pilates, and weight training. Having a strong physical body can help to prevent injuries on the ice. A study done on postural control modifications induced by Synchronized Skating was printed in *Sport Sciences for Health*. It reports that studies like this have been previously completed on ballet dancers, but not ice skaters (Alpini, Mattei, Schlecht, & Kohen-Raz, 2008). In this study it found that ice skaters, particularly synchronized skaters studied from the Italian National Synchronized Skating Team, had much better control of posture and balance in more difficult balancing situations than a control group of physically fit individuals who had no previous experience on the ice (Alpini et al., 2008). In the discussion section of the article, it says that, “Synchronized Skating depends on a combination of artistic and athletic tasks which, in combination with an effective technical training program, improve both static and dynamic postural control” (Alpini et al., 2008). Ironically, the research showed that in more stable conditions, skaters showed less postural control. Researchers made it seem, “comparable to what happens after travel on a ship: when adapted to an unsteady surface it is more difficult to maintain proper balance on ground” (Alpini et al., 2008). The importance of posture and balance can be displayed not only when on the ice, but in everyday situations that can prevent slipping and falling along with injury, such as icy/snowy conditions, uneven ground, etc. However, as silly as it

may seem, it is sometimes more difficult for ice skaters to walk on an even surface than to skate on the ice after a practice.

Although there is a long list of positive impacts and aspects of synchronized skating, there is also an underbelly to the sport, just like any other. Some of the major issues that comes with an aesthetic sport are concerns of weight, body image, and of course, nutrition.

An article in the *Journal of Sport Behavior* by Christy Greenleaf aims at studying weight pressures and social physique anxiety in collegiate synchronized skaters (2004). This article states that, "Female athletes, in particular, may find that not only is their performance evaluated, but that their bodies are judged as well. Numerous research studies have examined the relationship between sport participation and body image" (Greenleaf, 2004). Despite having a vast amount of research done on this subject of different sports, much of it has been ambiguous – some say that sport participation creates unhealthy body image, while other researchers say that participation is related to "positive or improved" body image (Greenleaf, 2004). Greenleaf mentions that there are different types of sports, and in particular, "aesthetic, lean and judged sports have been suggested as sport contexts in which female athletes are more likely to experience body and weight concerns" (2004). The aesthetic aspect focuses on appearance, gracefulness, and physique; lean sports emphasize low body fat and encourage the belief that low body fat will improve performance; judged sports involve the subjective evaluation of athletes by experts (Greenleaf, 2004). For certain, synchronized skating would meet all of the characteristics described above, along with sports like gymnastics, and diving, as well as singles ice skating, considered separate discipline in Figure

Skating. Because of the athletic and aesthetic demands, "There is potential for increased pressure to be placed on these athletes to maintain lean body physiques" (Ziegler et al., 2005). In sports such as synchronized skating, there is often a stereotypical body type that an athlete desires, despite whether or not physically being able to meet that body type. According to the research by Greenleaf, "The 'ideal' synchronized skating body was consistently described as tall thin, and strong," by the athletes themselves (2004). For athletes who are short, there is nothing that a person can do to increase height, although they could put extra effort towards being thin and strong. Being on a team of 16-24 girls has the potential for constant body-image appraisal from skaters, which may have negative effects on skaters if not evaluated realistically and put into positive and helpful contexts. Unfortunately, "Studies of body image satisfaction among female skaters have revealed a tendency toward distorted body image, excessive concern about body weight, and food restriction" (Ziegler et al., 2005). Some of these issues with weight and body image stem from outside the athlete themselves. Research has shown that, "perceived weight pressures, stemming from sources such as teammates, coaches, and judges, are related to self-presentational body concerns" (Greenleaf, 2004). To combat these negative aspects, there needs to be a greater emphasis on positive self-appraisals, positive self-image, and maintaining a healthy body shape, not just one that is "lean".

Nutrition can often be a thorny subject for any athlete who takes part in an aesthetic, lean, judged sport. There have been numerous amounts of research done on the dietary intake of ballet dancers and gymnasts, but none of synchronized skaters until recently. A study done by Ziegler, Kannan, Jonnalagadda, Krishnakumar, Taksali,

and Nelson was the first to explore the dietary intake of a group of collegiate synchronized skaters in 1998. Ziegler and Jonnalagadda completed a similar study again in 2002. In the study from 1998, it showed that compared to a typical recommended daily diet of 2,000-2,500kcal for skaters training 10-20 hours per week, skaters age fourteen to eighteen, and nineteen to thirty consumed only 1497 and 1700 average calories daily, respectively (Ziegler et al., 2005). The results show that from the study in 1998, there was a significant decrease in the amount of vitamins and micronutrients consumed compared to the recommended daily amount (RDA) (Ziegler et al., 2005). Ziegler adds that, "If athletes restrict energy intake to less than 1800kcal, getting adequate macronutrients and micronutrients to maintain optimum health and to train intensely is almost impossible" (2005). In the second study completed in 2002, Ziegler and Jonnalagadda note that, "Forty percent of skaters reported using a dietary supplement, with the most common being multivitamin-minerals" in order to make up for a diet lacking in these minerals and vitamins (2006). To help combat the lack of proper nutrition, "Given that Synchronized Skating is a team sport, it is important to encourage all team members to maintain adequate dietary intakes to support the positive performance and well-being of individual synchronized skaters and the entire team" (Ziegler & Jonnalagadda, 2006). Part of the teamwork aspect of synchronized skating should be to start early with discussing healthy eating habits and body images with teammates. It is important to start as young as possible so that skaters can accept their body when it is healthy, not just "lean", or whatever characteristic that happens to be desired most.

The sport of synchronized skating has had a fascinating start that has propelled it

to being the fastest growing discipline in Figure skating today. From the unexpected beginnings in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to having teams skating in over 20 countries, the years of development have catapulted it to where it is today with a far-reaching influences on athletes and skaters all over the world who participate annually. The future of the sport and where it will head next concerning the Olympics is not set in stone, but skaters remain hopeful. The culture of synchronized skating as a whole, along with the individual teams and team members, demonstrates a cohesive collection of athletes, despite location differences around the world. The positive and negative impacts of synchronized skating are various and have been touched upon in this paper, although there are many more favoring each side. Although still a relatively unknown sport outside the realm of those who are in the world of Figure Skating, the President of U.S. Figure skating, Ron Hershberger, describes fittingly, "Synchronized skating provides challenging and exhilarating team experiences for skaters of all ages. From the rigors of national and international competition to the camaraderie of beginner, developmental and adult teams, synchronized skating offers skaters the opportunity to stay in the sport for a lifetime" (USFSA, 2006). Hopefully the information and insight of this paper brings about new fans and followers of the sport of synchronized skating as it continues to expand all over the world.

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